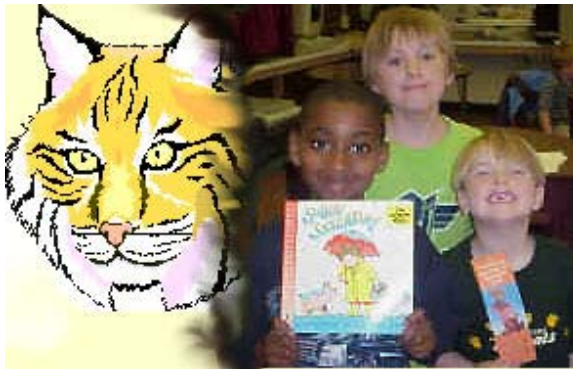


Nixon Elementary School



"Excitement can be felt all over the building, and kids see that excitement. Students are reading more and checking out books."

*"School improvement is a day-to-day part of our functioning as a staff. In the past, school plans were on the shelf and we didn't use them as part of our routine. The plans provided good goals but we didn't talk about them. We got into our daily grind and didn't talk about it...
...not on front burner until now!"*

Initial Implementation of the Iowa Professional Development Model

A. About the District

The Cedar Rapids District includes 34 schools (4 high schools, 6 middle schools and 24 elementary schools) and serves 18,000+ students in pre-K through 12th grade. This school district is considered one of the Urban Eight districts in Iowa. The city of Cedar Rapids is in Central Iowa and is served by AEA 10.

- A. About the District
- B. Applying the Operating Principles
- C. Professional Development Cycle
- D. Observations About the Site Visit

Students in the Cedar Rapids district are primarily white and middle class. The population of Cedar Rapids CSD is made up of 16.9% ethnic minorities, 34.5% low SES students, 83.1% white students, and 17% students with IEPs.

Nixon Elementary enrolls 380 students in grades K-5. The building population includes 41 special education students (25 level I and 16 behavior disorders). The elementary school is administered by a principal (Kay Coe) and has 23 teachers. Student demographics at Nixon differ from the district: Nixon has 15% ethnic minority, 0% ELL, 30% low SES and 1% with IEPs.

No district schools (including Nixon) are listed as Schools in Need of Assistance.

Department of Education Site Visit

Department of Education staff visited Nixon Community School on March 12, 2004. The principal, Kay Coe, and the entire leadership team were interviewed as a group. The principal and individual teachers were interviewed during the day, and many classrooms were observed. The AEA consultants who have worked closely with this school—Priscilla Polehna, Janeann Pennington, and Tina Hoffman—participated in group interviews.

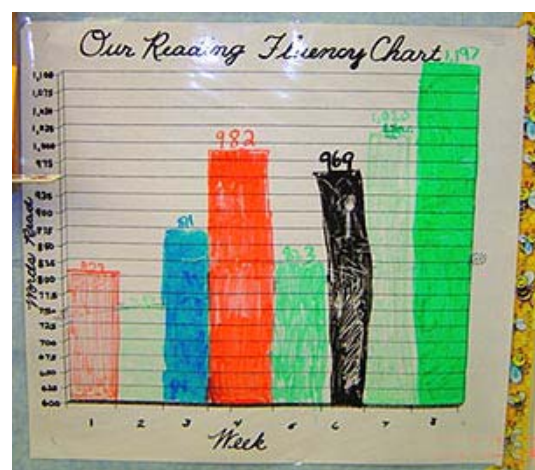


Photo: As Department of Education staff observed classrooms, they photographed data charts made by students and teachers.

B. Applying the Operating Principles

Focus on Instruction

This district has a school improvement plan that address reading and social/emotional goals. The building focuses on reading but also supports math at the same time. Math strategies include computation and facts strategies. The building professional development target is to increase reading fluency. Interviews and classroom observations revealed that the principal's and teachers' efforts are clearly focused on increasing student achievement through improved instructional practices. The district also has an expectation that all buildings use action research. Nixon is using the action research emphasis to support its focus on reading and to ensure that professional development efforts are data based.

Having a focus helped us to integrate information. –Teacher

Participative Decision Making

The Nixon staff has changed how its committees work. Every committee member has a responsibility to contribute to professional development. The faculty sees professional development (PD) as a shared responsibility. Interviews confirmed that the committee structure enables teachers to be leaders and supports them.

While the Principal provides consistent leadership, the professional development leadership team also makes decisions regarding professional development.

“Teachers help to decide on how to collect and organize data. Instead of listening to speakers they listen to each other.”

The Nixon leadership team for professional development includes the principal and teacher representatives from various grade levels and role groups (special education, general education, and media). Leadership team members were selected to include individuals who represent other district initiatives and committees. This team, which jointly develops its agenda, meets monthly to address elements of the PD cycle as needed.

The Leadership Team is actively supported by the work of the AEA special education support staff (a special education consultant, speech and language pathologist and a school psychologist).

“It is important for a school to find the leaders within a building and support them to be leaders. Professional development gives them ownership.”



Photo: A teacher displays a class's reading data chart .

Simultaneity

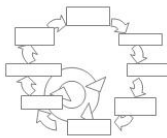
The leadership team and, for the most part, the general faculty appear to be focused on fluency to improve reading comprehension. A math initiative currently is being sustained, as per the district goals and priorities. It appears that the building faculty members are able to keep the focus on reading at this point. A challenge for the leadership team will be to integrate the current PD focus on reading with existing initiatives in such a way that the focus on reading and Nixon's existing initiatives together support the student achievement goal rather than compete for teacher time and attention.

Leadership

The Principal provides instructional leadership at Nixon by keeping the focus on learning, modeling the use of data, and emphasizing quality instruction as an essential function of this school. The Principal participates in leadership team meetings and is very knowledgeable about PD content and its implementation in each classroom. Kay is part of a coaching team and continuously demonstrates hands-on involvement in the day-to-day operations of implementing professional development. The principal routinely conducts walk-throughs and documents evidence of implementation when it is observed. Walk-throughs are recorded on a log that lists the Iowa Teaching Standards and criteria.

“My advice to other schools is that the principal is key. This effort needs active leadership or it won’t work. The principal has to become an instructional leader.” –Teacher

C. The Professional Development Cycle



As is true of all the schools and districts who participated in the initial orientation to the Iowa Professional Development Model during the 2003-04 academic year, Nixon Elementary School has addressed some components of the PD cycle more thoroughly than others. In recent years, Nixon has focused on the collection and analysis of student data. This district has adopted the data analysis methods of an external consultant, Susan Ledig.

Collecting and Analyzing Student Data

The data that were examined to set the professional development goal included the analyses of ITBS and the district reading assessment.

ITBS data were analyzed for the entire district at grades 4, 8, and 11 to provide a context for designing professional development. Grade 4 Nixon Elementary students are proficient in reading at the 80% level. A concern was noted in the gap between low SES students and the general population in reading—a gap of 13 percentile points in reading. Also of concern was the gap between IEP and non-IEP students in the school—a gap with a range of 55 percentile points. (1% percent of students at Nixon have IEPs.) Grade 4 math proficiency is 84%. Data analyses revealed multiple areas of need and concern; the district chose to focus in the areas of reading comprehension and math.

Goal Setting

The Cedar Rapids school district has a general reading goal. Each building must have an action plan for three goals. While Nixon is emphasizing reading for PD, the staff follows the same cycle with math; however, math data are not shared weekly at this time.

“Implementing the PD model has unified us as a staff. Before, we were doing our own thing in our rooms. Now we meet weekly to talk about results. This has brought us together to work on a common goal.”

The District’s goals are as follows:

- Students will increase achievement in reading and math by one year of NGE as measured on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills.

- The percentage of students considered proficient in reading total and math total scores on ITBS will increase each year through 2014.
- Students will grow in their social, emotional, and behavioral skills during the 2003-2004 school year.

The Nixon staff's data analyses led to the following building goals for increased student achievement; the goals are being addressed through the school's PD agenda:

- Increase the percent of Free and Reduced Lunch and IEP students scoring in the proficient range as measured by the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills.
- Decrease the percent of students referred to the office.

Selecting Content

Reading fluency was selected as the professional development target based on the district and building data and on available resources and expertise. In deciding upon Nixon's focus, ease of the training was also factored in. The leadership team wanted to select something that was not too difficult to learn as the professional development initiative was launched.

"As we were discussing our focus for next year, great questions were put forward. We won't have to worry about being specific enough."

The PD target is to increase reading fluency. The identified strategies include: repeated readings, paired readings, super signals, using punctuation, echo reading, choral reading, and readers' theater. Nixon also provides a fluency lab, Reading Counts (a commercial computer-based program used by individual students at all grade levels), a parent information project, test-taking strategies, and use of flexible small groups.

With the help of the AEA, the building reading team looked up research and shared it with the rest of the staff. The principal and AEA consultants had prior training on fluency, and they accessed resources and expertise from the Reading First initiative and the Statewide Reading Team.

"When teachers understand the foundations of the research; it gives the [PD initiative] integrity."

Designing Process for Professional Development

Staff development is organized around 8-week implementation periods; a flow chart is in place for keeping track of this cycle. Staff learning days are focused on the fluency initiative, with school personnel, AEA personnel, and district facilitators presenting the theory.

Learning Opportunities Schedule. The staff meets every Wednesday morning to review implementation data, write journal entries, and discuss strategies. They also meet weekly in coaching teams. Additionally, five district inservice days plus four half-days distributed through



Photo: State consultant (right) observed and visited with Nixon staff about professional development processes for reading.

the year are devoted to professional development. The following are examples of process components:

- Priscilla Polehna (AEA speech pathologist) and Kay Coe (principal) present on Theory–Content. Theory is delivered in the form of presentations and reading materials.
- Weekly team meetings are held in a central location, where all faculty meet in grade level teams (a three-grade span per team). Team meeting times are structured. Agendas are set and guidelines provided for conducting collaborative work.
- Demonstrations have been provided by AEA consultants. Interviews indicate that peer coaching partners also provide demonstrations for each other. Demonstrations have been provided more often in the beginning of the training cycle.
- Classroom observations are formally and deliberately built into the design.
- Teachers work on writing lessons together.

“The Iowa PD Model has contributed to the foundation of professional development; now the AEA has to lead.”

On-Going Cycle

The on-going cycle of learning opportunities, collaborative team meetings, study of implementation, and analysis of formative student data occur primarily in the structure of team meetings. All the training on fluency strategies have been provided by the AEA staff and principal.

“Common training has provided the opportunities to revisit the strategies and to make them come to life as a teacher and as a building.”

Collaboration and Implementation

Collaboration. Weekly team meetings are devoted to professional development. The Nixon staff has established clear routines for working together collaboratively in these meetings. The teams have identified roles and procedures for collaborative team meetings and appear to work together productively on assigned tasks. The principal participates in each team meeting. Team meetings begin at 8:00 AM with all teams meeting in the same room. A typical team meeting begins with 15 minutes of discussing the data. Then the teams discuss the week, scheduling when they will coach and observe each other. In the large group, teachers share what worked well during the week. Meetings may be used to present how to graph data and to provide time to work on graphs.

“Time needs to be scheduled and protected for collaborative team work. This time has to be sacred.” –Principal

This building had a tradition of working in teams. The Principal asked staff to discuss how they wanted to organize Nixon’s coaching teams. They decided to form cross-level teams (3 grade levels) and self-selected their coaching team memberships. Math teams are also organized this way. Special education teachers are fully integrated into the teams.

“Through peer coaching we found that there were different interpretations on what the strategy was. We knew we needed to get consistent to get fidelity.”

Peer coaching team guidelines have been shared with the faculty. This protocol includes the expectation that teachers observe a short lesson at each session (sessions are 8 weeks) and that coaches take turns observing each other.

“Teachers perceive that coaching is not evaluative; rather, peer coaching is a learning support.”

Minutes are not routinely recorded and collected, although occasionally meeting activities are documented.

To prepare for working collaboratively, coaching teams read some information about peer coaching and how it works, including literature by Joyce, Showers, Calhoun and others.

Implementation. The implementation plan indicates that strategies are to be used in all classrooms three times a week. Student data are collected weekly but the systematic collection of implementation data has not been fully implemented in this initiative. Currently, the staff documents implementation by keeping a reflection journal, and they share their efforts weekly in team meetings. Reflection journals provide some teacher perceptual data on the strategies being applied but do not yield quantitative data on frequency or fidelity of strategy use. Frequency of collaboration and coaching are documented.

The Principal reported that monitoring implementation has been a challenge, because the current belief among faculty is that it is important to focus on how individual students are responding to instruction (rather than focusing on collecting teacher implementation data and student data). The plan for next year is to build in a procedure for gathering implementation data on a monthly basis. Teacher interviews indicated that the faculty realizes that they do not know about the frequency of fidelity of their implementation and that is something they intend to address in 2004-05.

Teachers collect data on each strategy. Weekly random sampling of students is recorded for each grade level. Staff members are assigned to each grade to pull “probe” data together, display the data on spread sheets, and study the results. Interviews indicated that the team has used data to shape future PD. For example, a decision was made not to go on to the next strategy because the data indicated the need to work on consistency of implementation.

Department of Education staff walked through each classroom at Nixon and noticed evidence of data collection on student use of the strategies (fluency probe charts and graphs) in almost every room. We also observed strategies being taught in a few classrooms and had an opportunity to hear 5th grade students describe how they used the strategies and what they enjoyed about the reading program at Nixon.

Formative Data Collection

Weekly reading probes at all grade levels measure words per minute in conjunction with comprehension of passages (district-developed leveled reading probes – LAPO/ERA assessments). A random sampling procedure is used for reading probes so that only a representative sample is tested every week. Equivalent level tests are administered at eight-week intervals. Kindergarten students are

On Data Collection and Analysis:

“Every staff member looks at data every week and base[s] our teaching on the data; data drives our instruction.”

“This has been personally useful for me; this [the PD initiative at Nixon] provides data to pull from for justifying placements or for staffing out [of special education].”
—Special education teacher

“[The professional development effort provides] lots of different data. As a member of a faculty, it has united us. It is always a tough sell when it comes to change, but with data this work becomes strategic and obvious.”

“Using data is powerful and frustrating – collecting it – sustaining its use. It is hard for one individual, but it helps to have a team.” —Principal

“The good news is that we really look at data, and we are now looking at other sources of data and paying more attention to it. Data drives the decisions. We are learning how to evaluate data properly and use it to focus on the strategy.” —Principal

assessed on rapid automatic naming of alphabet letters. Special education students are included in the data, contributing to significant ranges in scores. The formative data collection system used in the Nixon PD design provides good feedback for teachers

regarding how the program is working on an ongoing basis and will be useful for showing growth as part of the summative evaluation.

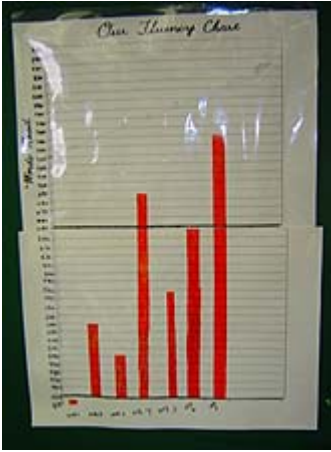


Photo: One more classroom example of data records for reading.

Summative Data

ITBS data will be used to evaluate program effectiveness. ITBS is administered in October in the Cedar Rapids district, and the first evaluation will occur mid-year in the 2004-2005 academic year. Summative evaluation also includes district curriculum-based measures.

"Our child study teams [for special education] now have a better understanding that they are helping all kids. This team has not tested individual kids this year. The PD initiative puts the focus on helping all students. This is empowering. We don't have to turn it [serving students who need help] over to special education. We have the data to know where the kids are and to decide on what we need to try in the regular classroom rather than referring for services."

"We have only had one special education referral all year."

External Technical Assistance

The AEA special education team has played an active and valuable role in supporting professional development at Nixon school. The AEA provided technical assistance by assisting with setting up reading fluency probes, and collecting and entering data. AEA staff helped with selecting content as well as delivering training. Interviews indicated that the Nixon leadership and staff were appreciative of the technical assistance and support provided by the AEA on an ongoing basis.

"The roles of AEA staff are changing. It is a change to have a speech pathologist on the literacy team. It takes flexibility to come into a classroom and model a reading strategy."

A portion of the leadership team rated the building's professional development in May of 2003 and again in April of 2004. The Nixon team's perception of their implementation of professional development practices indicated that they made improvements in each of the attributes of professional development, with significant growth in collaboration and formative and summative evaluation. Their ratings suggest that gains were made, but there is room for improvement in providing intensive professional development, following-up, giving support and technical assistance, and focusing on instruction and curriculum.

"I found that this year the relationship between the AEA and school has changed dramatically. A paradigm shift has occurred. This is a first step, and now we need to make sure we figure out how we are really going to support this".
– AEA consultant

D. Observations About the Site Visit

Nixon school has made excellent progress in its first effort to implement the Iowa Professional Development Model. The staff has addressed the operating principles--focusing on curriculum and instruction, sharing decision making, demonstrating strong and distributed leadership. Staff

members have systematically implemented the use of student data to make decisions about professional development.

Primary agendas in the coming year will include:

- Structuring teams for planning of more sophisticated use of implementation data;
- Determining ways to assess objectively the quality and/or fidelity of fluency lessons; and
- Frequency of teacher implementation of lessons.

The Ongoing Cycle could be improved by adjusting collaborative team meetings to include more opportunities for teachers to design lessons together.

“The power goes back to all the teachers. The expertise asked of special educators is different. We use energies differently. Special education support staff are modeling how to use strategies rather than testing.”